

Statement by Congressman Steve Buyer

House Committee on Rules

Hearing on H.R. 4975, Lobbying Accountability and Transparency Act

March 30, 2006

Mr. Chairman, Congresswoman Slaughter, Members of the Rules Committee: I appreciate the opportunity to appear before the Rules Committee today to discuss the reform package under consideration. This reform package has been fashioned to address some real and perceived problems with the operation of the institution of the House of Representatives.

Some of the changes in this package are designed to address concerns about the designation of earmarks in various pieces of legislation. Other changes are designed to address the relationship between the professional lobbying community and Members of Congress.

I am before you today to propose a change that is not contained in the current package, but one which I believe needs to be addressed as it too focuses on the integrity of Members of the House and the institution as a whole, and the trust which is given to Members to safeguard the interests of the United States.

As recently as last year, one of our Members had access to the highest levels of classified material that this country possesses due to his seat on the House Intelligence Committee and Defense Appropriations Subcommittee. This same Member was also convicted of taking bribes and steering millions of dollars in defense and intelligence contracts. As disgraceful as that is to our institution, what if the disgrace had involved classified information?

This possibility has bothered me and I think it needs to be addressed. Therefore, I am proposing that Members of Congress who want to serve on the House Intelligence Committee and Defense Appropriations Subcommittee must first obtain a security clearance.

I have since learned from security experts here in the House that if a security clearance had been required, some of the financial irregularity of the above Member would likely have been discovered sooner.

My proposal would amend the Rules of the House to require any Member who wants a seat on these two committees to first obtain a security clearance. It is very simple.

These two Committees have access to the most closely guarded secrets our nation possesses. These Committees are positions of the highest level of trust. I don't think that asking Members to obtain the clearance in exchange for the privilege of serving on these Committees is too much to ask to show the American people that we take this trust seriously.

I believe the burden should be on the Member to obtain the clearance. I believe that the Sergeant at Arms office can assist Members with the necessary arrangements. There are entities inside and outside the government that work in this field that could assist the House.

I have had discussion with Republican leadership and not one has told me it is a bad idea. I urge you to give this proposal consideration, to consider the seriousness of service relating to intelligence matters, and to include this proposal in the lobby reform package before you.